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ABSTRACT

The attempt in this paper was four fold: (1) present some historical facts regarding sensitivity training; (2) discuss concerns of some key professionals in the field; (3) describe some facets of sensitivity training programs; and (4) note implications of this movement for counseling and teaching in elementary and secondary schools. The laboratory movement has developed some power procedures for facilitating human change. To date some of the problems in the use of these techniques and processes have not been clearly specified and dealt with. The many issues and problems related to this movement should be analyzed and evaluated. Any positive results from a program of systematic evaluation could form the basis for firmly developed institutional and professionalized position for the implementation of the laboratory method. Until this is done, serious reservations must be held regarding the use of sensitivity group sessions with young children, adolescents, and adults. (Author/KJ)

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The Sensitivity Training Movement: Professional Implications for Elementary and Secondary School Counseling and Teaching

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by

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The Sensitivity Training Movement: Professional Implications for Elementary and Secondary School Counseling and Teaching, was a challenging topic to pursue. Time does not permit me to react to all of the issues, problems, and complexities that confront counselors and teachers when consideration is being made for the utilization of this group process. But I will touch upon a number of concerns and discuss others in greater detail.

The intent of this paper is (1) to present a few historical facts which are basic to understanding more fully the present day scene regarding sensitivity training, (2) to discuss some of the concerns expressed by key professionals in the field of the behavioral sciences, (3) to describe various facets of sensitivity training institutes as

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they exist today, and (4) to discuss some implications the movement has for counseling and teaching in elementary and secondary schools.

The Sensitivity Training Movement: An Overview

Sensitivity training, in its various forms, has grown tremendously in popularity in recent years. The increasing number of certain people who express enthusiasm for this group process greatly surpasses the objective research reports that might support it. There appears to be a gulf between the on-going activities and the failure of the facilitator (or agent of charge) to interpret for himself and others the psychological-sociological base for sensitivity-encounter sessions.

Historically, human relations training was started over two decades ago. Among the persons who established the first training center in Bethel, Maine (National Training Laboratory - Institute for Applied Behavioral Sciences) were: Leland Bradford, Ronald Lippitt, and Kenneth Benne. Basically these men were influenced by the work of Kurt Lewin, internationally known social psychologist. The fertile ideas were germinated during the summer months of 1946-48. Focus was on a new method of training people for communities in the process of democratic group formation. This new dynamic procedure was to be a laboratory for self-examination of group process. The original intent of these innovators was to explore the roles and functions of the leadership and membership rather than the individual personality and development of personality. The major focus at this time was on structural group

task exercises including the development of techniques to be used by participant when he returned to his organization.

About the mid 1950's the activities at the National Training Laboratory (NTL) came under the influence of persons who represented the developing field of humanistic and existential psychology. It was about or around this time that the original ideas fostered NTL began to take on many different forms. New procedures and techniques were developed for the group process now called marathon groups, sensitivity groups, encounter groups and personal growth laboratories.

As one surveys the literature of the human laboratory movement, a trend can be observed. In the 1940's the emphasis was placed on certain methods for use in teaching American communities how to participate in a democracy. This was the period of group process and task oriented group function. By the early 1950's the shift was from task orientation to individual growth, to self-knowledge, actualization and motivation. Then by the 60's a rather abrupt change occurred when the empahsis shifted from an educative to a therapeutic orientation. Weschler, Massarik and Tannenbaum (1962) in an article entitled "The Self in Process: A Sensitivity Training Emphasis," stated, "By now it should be quite clear that major similarities exist between this type of sensitivity training and some forms of group psychotherapy. The rather distinctive difference between training and therapy . . . appear to be coming more and more blurred . . . . Today it is difficult to talk about what sensitivity training

or what psychotherapy is and should be. Nor is it necessary to draw a clear distinction between them."

Behavioral Scientist Express Concerns

The position held in this statement is, however, being challenged as we enter a new decade. After sifting and winnowing the literature on the subject, it was interesting to note that a number of key persons who have been involved in small groups from its early beginnings are now looking at the entire scenario from a critical and analytical perspective. Just recently these people have expressed themselves in writing pointing out their concerns and suggesting caution in the use of certain small group procedures and techniques.

In his book, A Time to Speak Out - On Human Values and Social Research, Dr. Herbert C. Kelman, (1968) Professor of Psychology and Social Research at Harvard University, addresses himself to the topic - "Manipulation of Human Behavior: An Ethical Dilemma," Professor Kelman raises some penetrating questions - questions that have emerged out of his experiences in T-groups, encounters and sensitivity training sessions.

Dr. Martin Lakin, Department of Psychology, Duke University, has expressed himself in a very articulate manner in an article for the American Psychologist, October, 1969, entitled, "Ethical Issues in Sensitivity Training." His observations and perceptive analysis of the situation that presently exists throughout the country is well taken. He devotes his paper to five major topics: (1) Pre-group Concerns, (2) Ethical Questions Related to the Processes of

Training Groups, (3) Learning and Experiential Focuses, (4) Ethical Issues and Evaluations, and (5) Post-training Ethical Issues. For all who work in the field of the helping professions, those who train persons for various positions in psychology, counseling, and guidance and in teacher education, this paper should be required reading.

In the November 15, 1969, issue of Saturday Review, an article appeared entitled "Sense and Non-Sense about Sensitivity Training," written by Dr. Max Birnbaum, Associate Professor of Human Relations and Director of Boston University Human Relations Laboratory. He states: "The most serious threat to sensitivity training comes first from its enthusiastic but frequently unsophisticated supporters, and second from a host of newly hatched trainers, long on enthusiasm or entrepreneural expertise, but short on professional experience, skill, and wisdom."

Each of these three men has expressed his concerns in a somewhat similar but yet in a slightly different way. All, however, have one thing in common. Each has participated in the activities of the National Training Laboratory in Bethel, Maine. In 1948 Professor Kelman spent the summer at the National Training Laboratory for Group Development; in 1949 he spent the summer at the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, working on a study of human relations in industry. Throughout his graduate studies at Yale he devoted much time to study of attitude change with Carl Hovland. Professors Martin Lakin and Max Birnbaum also participated in the activities of the National Training Laboratory and in 1964 became associates of the organization.

Focusing our attention on the history and development of this group dynamic theory and relating it to what is actually occurring in the field would seem to be an important obligation for school counselors, counselor-educators, and those whose main responsibility is to train teachers of youth.

The Sensitivity Training Scene Today

What is the present status of sensitivity training throughout the country? Observations suggest that the original intent of the group dynamic processes has become distorted by some extreme methods and procedures. The intent of this portion of the paper is to describe, comment, and point out some issues regarding certain activities on the present scene.

Probably the most dramatic development that has occurred over the past three or four years is the creation of Sensitivity Training Institutes described as non-profit corporations. These corporations are usually formed by a few people whose general concern is to help other human beings to develop and utilize their human potentialities for a more fulfilling life experience. Brochure material of one particular institute states: "This undertaking is entirely humanistic in concept. In order to remain effective it must also be humanistic in structure and operation. It has, therefore, been resolved that this endeavor shall be professional in creativeness, aggressive in purpose, and non-profit in operation." You can make what you will of that statement.

Brochures used to advertise the institute programs are usually attractive in design, clear in stating tuition fees, somewhat vague in the discussion of purposes, goals and functions. . . . The novice, one who has little knowledge of the behavioral sciences, will find it difficult to understand just what the program is precisely all about. As indicated in a number of articles, persons from industry and business, most especially, find the initial stages of the training period incomprehensible. A front page news release in the Wall Street Journal, July 14, 1969, reported that management of certain industries are now retreating from participation in this group dynamic activity. Some companies see more harm than good in sensitivity training sessions. It has been stated that frank exchanges sometimes have hampered work and sessions have produced psychological breakdowns.

Dr. George Odiorne, (1969) Dean of University of Utah's College of Business stated, "If there is one thing we cannot stand in this world it is the business called 'leveling.' Often we can't bear to find out what everybody thinks of us. If you want to work with a group, there are some things you just don't say to him. Frankness that is not work oriented should go on in the bedroom not in the boardroom." He concluded -- "Members of a group should not be allowed to probe the very depths of a person's soul."

Among industrial firms who have withdrawn from sensitivity training sessions are: Humble Oil and Refining, Honeywell, Inc., U. S. Plywood - Champion Papers, Inc., Aerojet and General Corp., Northrop Corp., and others.

Marvin Dunnette and John Campbell (1969) of the University of Minnesota have supported industry's decision to terminate such training as presently being conducted on grounds that little to no evidence exists to support the contention that T-group sessions will change the work behavior of most trainees.

The costs involved in attending a sensitivity-encounter institute are not to be overlooked. Tuition fees vary from $35-$100 for a weekend session to $300-$350 for a three week session. Food and lodging is an added expenditure. In some areas where the public can carry a heavier financial burden, the institute fees can run as high as $1000-$1500 for a one week session. As stated in Bradford's orignial thinking, meetings are to be held in a residential setting, away from ones home and employment. This usually means a "posh" lodge or resort by the ocean, a lake, or in the mountains.

The major emphasis of the program of the institutes that have sprung up like mushrooms across the country is on directly experiencing the kind of group that is suggested by Carl Rogers (1966) when he writes:

> "It usually consists of ten to fifteen persons and a facilitator or leader. It is relatively unstructured, providing a climate of maximum freedom for personal communication. Emphasis is upon the interactions among the group members, in an atmosphere which encourages each to drop his defenses and facades and thus enables him to relate directly and openly to other members of the group--the basic encounter. Individuals come to know themselves and each other more fully than is possible in the usual social or working relationships; the climate of openness, risk-taking, and honesty generates trust, which enables the person to recognize and change self-defeating attitudes, test out and adopt more innovative and constructive behaviors, and subsequently to relate more adequately and effectively to others in his everday life situation."

This is the stated premise that is generally used by encounter-sensitivity training leaders. In actuality the observed behavior of participants does not always coincide with the kinds of outcomes hoped for and as stated above. The assumption made is that persons will relate better in their everyday life as a result of group training. This still remains as an assumption which needs to be researched objectively. Some of my personal observations of certain individuals who have experienced a number of encounter-sensitivity training sessions indicate they do not relate more adequately and effectively to others in their everyday life situation. In fact, some become extremely insensitive. In small groups, a person might develop warm and open relationships with strangers - only to return home unable to use his so called innovative, constructive behaviors with his wife, children and colleagues.

This position is also held by Dr. Robert W. Resnick (1970) in a recent article when he stated: "Even when a person breaks through his own shackles as often happens in encounter groups, sensitivity groups, nude groups, marathon groups and drug groups, he typically has great difficulty in integrating his behavior and experiences into his everyday life. I'm convinced that his freedom to <u>be</u> was given him by the situation, the group, the leader, fatigue or drugs."

The above statement expresses clearly my observations and analysis of several persons who have participated in groups. I have in the past raised a number of situational questions regarding a person's future behavior as a result of his experience in an institute which offers training in assisting persons to become more sensitive, honest and

open in his relationship with others. Will a person develop a high level of integrity in a small group situation but in the real world not practice integrity? Will a person develop close intimate relationships in the small group, discuss his experiences with friends back home but conclude his story by saying -- "but - oh don't tell my wife!" Is this person who shouts -- "it was great! fantastic! it was a beautiful experience!" really as open, honest and sensitive as he claims? Or did this situation give him the opportunity to experience a catharsis only? Will a facilitator of groups use the group situation as an opportunity to unload his frustrations and problems on members of the group and thereby experience a type of therapy at the expense of the others?

What kind of professional guidelines and controls have been established for the institute where it has been estimated that between one and two million people have experienced their offerings? Will a participant, through the group experience, find <u>true</u> perceptual answers to such questions as: What is it that I do that turns other people off? Why am I not getting through to those for whom I care most? How do others see me? Does the encounter group really facilitate the individual to unlock his true feelings and communicate them to others? Or are these expressed feelings his feelings of the moment which were aroused by the group which may or may not be the person's real continuing feelings regarding himself and others?

Letting the group members see the true <u>me</u> seems to be very important to the underlying assumptions held by persons directing institute activities. The question raised is--is this the <u>true</u> <u>me</u>

as expressed by the participant? Is it possible that his expressed feelings at that moment in time was influenced by the group and do not represent the me that exists in his life space while on the job, in the home and during his socializing hours?

A number of institutes state in their brochures that college credit can be earned by participating in the program. In some instances nine to fifteen hours can be earned by paying an additional fee to the college or university. I have contacted the academic deans in institutions of higher education in the state of Colorado. To my present knowledge none of the state supported colleges and universities in Colorado grant academic credit to students for participating in privately sponsored sensitivity-encounter sessions. Something needs to be done about this kind of subtle generalized implication.

What are the professional qualifications of the persons who establish and run sensitivity training institutes? What quality of training have the facilitators had? Where might an interested potential participant learn about the quality of the staff members of a particular institute? These questions should be answered so no doubt is left in the minds of the reader. It is not uncommon to read in their literature that the same directors and consultants serve several geographical regions. How much time and effort is devoted to each organization by these persons? Does the end justify the means?

What are the selection criteria for admission to the sensitivity-encounter training institutes? Is the assumption made that this process is good for all who pay the fee? Is it possible that such training will

attract the psychologically unsound? If this did occur, is the group facilitator professionally qualified to deal with the kind of behavior that could develop during sessions? Or will he not take on such responsibility and state -- "people will do what they need to do."

These are just a few of the major questions that have come to my mind in the use of the laboratory method in this kind of situation. In a few instances these problems have not escaped the attention of professional educators and lay people. In some rare cases, careful measures have been taken to deal with these problems. In other instances such problems are almost totally unobserved or ignored.

Implications for Counseling and Teaching in Elementary and Secondary School

It is quite evident that much confusion exists among directors and facilitators of sensitivity training institutes. The purposes, goals and processes for developing positive self-concepts and behavior patterns are not spelled out. Many of the so-called growth processes to which reference is made are seldom articulated. In my own experience in a training laboratory, I found that the participants were not interested in engaging in an intellectual discussion for purposes of relating the affective learning to the cognitive. Instead, response to issues I thought important to explore were met with non-verbal response. The shrug of the shoulder, raising an eye brow or some other facial contortion coupled with a few vocal inflections. As one group leader told me at the beginning of the sessions, "Go through the experience first, then we'll talk theory." For some reason we never did get together to do just that! A review of the literature also indicates

there is a lack of agreement on the definitions of terms, purposes, goals and procedures of group work.

What implications does all of this have for sensitivity-encounter sessions for elementary and secondary school children? I believe there are a number of concerns which deserve serious analysis and evaluation by counselors, teachers, administrators and parents.

Before counselors and teachers introduce this group process into the lives of young children and adolescents a number of issues and problems need to be explored. What solid objective evidence do we have that suggest these procedures are of significant value for adults? What objective follow-up studies might be referred to for bona fide knowledge that people, in fact, benefit by such experiences and are able to apply their so-called newly acquired skills to everyday life situations? What evidence do we have that encounter - sensitivity group sessions are beneficial for the elementary and secondary school child? What objective evidence do we have that so-called "Teenage Awareness Workshops" develop positive, wholesome concepts about self and others?

There is absolutely no respectable objective evidence that sensitivity training sessions for young children and adolescents has fostered the kind of changes in behavior the enthusiast purport. Proponents of sensitivity training programs keep saying, "We've got to change!" The question I raise is "Change for what?" Why is there a need for a person to change his life style if it works well for him and does not infringe on another? Are we to facilitate change just for the sake of change? If a child comes from a home

where the value system has in fact fostered good and wholesome family, school and community relations, what need is there for change? Might not the attacks leveled at children from such an environment cause a child to develop some ambivalent and even false feelings about himself and his home situation? I am reminded of a counselor who in a sensitivity training session asked a twelve year old boy if he really felt his parents planned for him and wanted him. This, I suppose, was to cause the child to explore himself in depth and breadth(sic) which would result in giving him a new and fuller dimension to his life space. However, this incident resulted in the need for psychiatric help lasting for over a year. All this following a weekend encounter? What were the purposes, the goals, the rationale for this particular group session?

Too frequently educators hear of new ideas, grab them and put them into operation before little or any pre-testing has been conducted and no controlled plans for evaluation established. At present the whole concept of group dynamics appears to be distorted. What one person perceives as appropriate another may not and yet neither has evidence to justify his operation. What is needed, it seems to me, are established models for these activities with complete and clear explanations. Of course this will force those involved in these activities to incorporate his affective insights together with cognitive descriptions. This is a necessary step and it must be done if proponents of this movement intend to use these procedures in the elementary and secondary schools.

The child, parents, teachers and administrators must have a clear understanding of what the school counselor and teacher is doing in group work. The counselor and/or teacher should be able to articulate the rationale behind his activities orally and in writing. He should allow teachers and parents to observe and participate if they wish. The purposes and goals must be spelled out. The young, more so than adults, must have a clear understanding of what they are getting into. This activity cannot be passed-off as fun and games. It is not ethical to seduce pupils in getting them to respond emotionally toward one another in a manner which could develop into a hate session.

Young children are usually very open and honest -- so much so they can hurt one another deeply. The expressed feeling of certain groups members leveled at a particular child could result from long felt feelings or they could be feelings of the moment stimulated by the situation. Might not the attacker be wrong? Is it not possible that certain children will experience an emotional freeing experience at the expense of another child? Will children really benefit from such group work? What are the purposes, goals and processes?

As professional counselor-educators, counselors, and teachers it behooves us to pause and take a good look at what is happening. For some people this is "the thing to do." It has become a fetish or cult hinging on mysticism. Statements have been made by the enthusiast that anyone can conduct group sessions and that all will benefit from experiences in group process. I wish I could point to some highly controlled objective research findings which

would bear this out. There are so many questions yet to be answered before encounter-sensitivity training sessions are incorporated into the guidance and counseling programs in the elementary and secondary schools. I fear that counselors and teachers could create serious problems rather than alleviating them. Certainly without thorough training unfortunate outcomes could result. Up to this time many persons have been interested in the techniques for conducting group sessions - but not in evaluation of outcomes. This appears to be one of the more serious shortcomings of those persons who conduct group sessions.

Truly professional people in the field of psychology, counseling, and guidance know the theory which undergirds their practice. I am convinced that many who are sold on sensitivity training know very little of the origin and development of the present group dynamic activities. There seems to be an anti-intellectual position developing in counselor and teacher education. Focus on the affective domain of the learning process devoid of the cognitive seems to be in vogue. To me this is irresponsible education. Counselor and teacher educators must combine the two - feelings and thinking need to be interrelated, forming a meaningful whole.

Summary and Concluding Statements

My attempt in this paper was four fold: (1) present some historical facts regarding sensitivity training, (2) discuss concerns of some key professionals in the field, (3) describe some facets of sensitivity training programs, and finally (4) note implications of this movement for counseling and teaching in elementary and secondary schools.

The laboratory movement has developed some powerful procedures for facilitating human change. To date some of the problems in the use of these techniques and processes have not been clearly specified and dealt with. The many issues and problems related to this movement should be analyzed and evaluated. Any positive results from a program of systematic evaluation could form the basis for firmly developed institutional and professionalized position for the implementation of the laboratory method. Until this is done, I shall continue to hold serious reservations regarding the use of sensitivity group sessions with young children, adolecents and adults.

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